DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 396 394 EA 027 618

AUTHOR Theron, A. M. C.; Westhuizen, Philip C. van der
TITLE The Management of Resistance to Change and Polarity in Educational Organisations.
PUB DATE Apr 96
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New York, NY, April 8-12, 1996).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Change Strategies; Conflict Resolution; Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; *Organizational Change; Organizational Communication; *Principals; *Resistance to Change; School Administration; Teacher Administrator Relationship

ABSTRACT

Research has shown that organizations differ on the basis of their willingness to change and the strategies they use to manage change. For this paper, data were gathered through a review of the literature and through nonstandard interviews with persons in two identified organizations who handle grievance procedures. The analysis identifies the different forms and types of resistance to change, describes strategies for managing resistance, and presents a model for managing resistance. Methods to manage resistance to change include education and communication, participation, facilitation and support, negotiation, persuasion/influence, manipulation/cooptation, and force. Guidelines for effective management of polarity are also offered. In summary, resistance is desirable and even necessary because it illuminates the need for more information about change; promotes better communication; identifies specific problems; facilitates improved planning for implementation; and indicates the intensity of staff attitudes toward change. Five figures are included. (Contains 16 references.) (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 396 394

THE MANAGEMENT OF RESISTANCE TO CHANGE AND POLARITY IN EDUCATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

A M C Theron

Department of Educational Sciences, Vaal Triangle Campus, Potchefstroom University, Vanderbijl Park 1900, South Africa

Philip C van der Westhuizen

Graduate School of Education, Potchefstroom University, Potchefstroom 2520, South Africa

Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), New York, 8 - 12 April 1996

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
P. van der Westhuizen
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

EA027618

THE MANAGEMENT OF RESISTANCE TO CHANGE AND POLARITY IN EDUCATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

1. Context

Research findings (cf. Dalin, 1978; Gjerde, 1983; Lovell & Wiles, 1983; Hanson, 1985; Coetsee, 1993) on the management of resistance revealed that organisations (i.e.. schools) clearly differ in respect of their willingness to change and manage change. The resistance to change often does not occur as resistance to change itself, but as resistance to the psychological and social results of the change.

Hall and Hord (1987) have already indicated that the principal is primarily responsible for the implementation of change in the school and must therefore be aware not only of the factors that cause resistance, but be thoroughly conversant with the manner in which resistance to change in his school must be managed. The aforementioned implies that rash actions, whether taken by the principal (managing body) or the supervisor of the subject to implement a new dispensation or new programme at school, could be unsuccessful primarily due to the resistance that develops.

The manner in which the principal (school community/managing body) reacts to the change depends to a large extent on whether he/she feels that such events threaten the interests of the school, to what extent it is prescribed or enforced, and whether adequate opportunity is created for personal participation. Confronted by unforeseen events which can cause uncertainty about established values and practices, the principal will, as a rule, try to neutralise or obviate the change (Smith & Crane, 1990). But when confronted by the realities that the educational dispensation is already in the process of change and resistance does exist, the correct procedure to follow is to keep the principal informed on how the resistance can be managed.

Another reason why the principal should know how to manage resistance to change in education, is that change places enormous pressure on personnel. According to Gerber *et al.*, (1994:108 - 117) a large majority of personnel is not prepared for the demands made on them by renewal and change. It has been averred that these staff members are often victims of tension accompanied by the various related symptoms, such as frustration, exhaustion, insomnia and moodiness, to mention a few.

Continual tension can further give rise to burn-out, which is gradually becoming more prevalent in teaching.

If the principal knows how to handle resistance to change in education, he could apply this knowledge positively to the advantage of the school and the school community. Possible resistance can be decreased when implementing the change, and the psychological reaction of the teacher (as well as pupil and school community) to protect him/her/itself against the effect or results of change and the accompanying tension can also be minimized. Furthermore, change can be implemented fairly easily if the principal knows and has insight into the nature, reasons, reactions and forms of resistance to change, and also knows how to handle and manage change in the school.

2. Aims of research

Research aim 1: to determine the different forms of resistance to change

Research aim 2: to determine the types of resistance to change

Research aim 3: to determine strategies available for managing resistance to change

Research aim 4: to determine the different methods to be used to manage resistance to change

Research aim 5: to compile a model for the management of resistance to change, and

Research aim 6: to determine guidelines for the effective management of polarity

3. Research methodology

3.1 Mode of inquiry

An extensive literature overview what conducted. Additional data were collected through nonstandard, scheduled interviews. Individuals (experts) in the document analysis (n = 2) as well as persons in identified organisations (n = 2) who handle grievance procedures were included in the sample.

3.2 Analysis of data

Firstly: In the analysis of interview data conventional procedures for analysing qualitative data were employed. The patterns in respondents' descriptions of their involvement in grievance procedures were coded.

Secondly: From the literature overview as well as from the interviews *theoretical models* were constructed which explain the kinds of resistance to change and the management of resistance to change and the management of polarity.

4. Findings

4.1 Findings with regard of research aim 1: Forms of resistance to change

The way in which resistance to change is typified, analysed and managed, mainly depends on the theoretical points of departure. There are two concepts about resistance to change, namely, the *revolutionary* perspective (change enforced from below) and the *reactionary* perspective (reaction to change enforced from above).

From a revolutionary point of view, resistance to change is seen as a logical necessity in society (i.e. education) to change existing (and oppressive) systems and structures. In educational context both Giroux (1983) and Chase (1988) argue that the use of resistance is related to moral and political injustice. That is why they see resistance as a positive means that must bring about a critical movement against a dominant ideology. Resistance is therefore an aid to (revolutionary) change. Giroux (1983:107) also makes the important remark that power cannot be exercised only by means of domination (suppression, discrimination), but also by means of resistance. That is why resistance is a necessary form of power, and the display of power (in education) a form of hope for the aggrieved. As a result, resistance is not only opposing behaviour (opposition) by the revolutionary, but a way of self-realisation and social emancipation that are accompanied by radical methods such as protests.

From a revolutionary perspective, it further appears that the school and pupil must be used to express resistance to the existing systems in order to change the social order outside the school, but also in the system (Aggleton, 1987). Thus: if the educational system and practices do not change, resistance must be employed to change and improve the existing practice.

In contrast to the above-mentioned view (the revolutionary enforcement of change) of resistance to change, *reactionary* resistance is also seen as a logical necessity in an organisation. This reaction arises when the existing system, customs and practices - the status quo - are indeed changed (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979:107). This view of resistance to change is thus a reaction to and a result of change that must be neutralised, and obviated or avoided (Smith & Crane, 1990:48). On the other hand, the revolutionary sees resistance as the beginning or cause of a process of change that can result in radical action.

From both the literature as well as the interviews it becomes clear that resistance to change in education as a complex phenomenon: if there is change in education there is resistance, and if there is no change there is also resistance. Therefore: to implement change successfully, it is imperative that the educational manager must have a basic knowledge of the management of resistance and polarity.

4.2 Findings with regard of research aim 2: Types of resistance *(cf. Figure 1)*

In a reactionary context, the teacher's reaction to change can be *passive* (such as psychological resistance, negative perceptions and attitudes) or *active* and *aggressive* (such as opposing views, demonstrations, strikes, boycotts - Coetsee, 1993). In both revolutionary and reactionary actions, resistance to change can be manifested by radical or aggressive resistance. This aggressive form can be manifested in radicalism in the form of sabotage, destruction of property and intimidatory actions which may even lead to the loss of life (Coetsee: 1993:1823).

The types and dynamics between passive, active and aggressive resistance to change are illustrated by *figure 1* (cf. Coetsee, 1993:1823). *Figure 1* indicates that the basis of passive resistance to change are negative perceptions, attitudes and opposing points of view. This is the milder form of resistance. Coetsee (1993:1823 - 1824) continues and says: "The more severe forms of active resistance and aggressive resistance are characterized by negative perceptions and attitudes eventually resulting in severally destructive behaviour. Blocking behavior refers to actions directed at stopping or ending the change, while subversion, sabotage, destructing, terrorising and killing are directed not only at stopping change but also at disruption and even destroying social systems in which change takes place."

4.3 Findings with regard to research aim 3: to determine strategic choices in managing resistance to change *(cf. figure 2)*

In any situation where change takes place in the school, principals need to make explicit and implicit strategic choices in respect of, inter alia, the tempo of change, the amount of planning and the involvement of interested parties. It further appears that successful change takes place when resistance is limited to a minimum and the school principal utilises a specific strategy - a strategy that relates to certain key situation variables.

The strategic choices that are available to the school principal, can be depicted on a continuum and is summarized in *figure 2*.

The key situation variables of strategic choices that must be considered (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979:112) are the following:

* The amount and type of resistance expected.
* The position of the school principal compared to that of the teachers offering resistance (in terms of authority and trust).
* The locus of relevant data for the planning of the change, and the energy required to implement it.
* What is at stake (e.g. the presence or absence of a crisis, the results of resistance, and change that does not occur).

From the above it appears that at the one end of the continuum the strategy of change comprises swift implementation, clear action, little involvement of interested parties and a disregard for any form of resistance. The method used to bring about change by using a specific strategy, is thus coercion. At the other end of the continuum, the change will occur somewhat slower, initially the plan of action will not be so clear and substantially more individuals than only the principal will be involved. This type of strategy is designed to limit resistance to a minimum, and the method used to implement the change will be participation and involvement.

Precisely where the effort of strategic change will be positioned on the continuum, depends on four factors:

* The amount and type of resistance that could possibly occur. The stronger the resistance that is expected, the more difficult it will be to

ignore it, and the further right the school principal will have to move on the continuum to decrease resistance.

- The position of the school principal compared to the resistance offered, primarily in respect of authority. The less authority the school principal has, the further right he will have to move on the continuum. The stronger the position of authority, the further he can move to the left.

- The teachers who have the relevant data for planning the change, as well as the expertise to implement it. The greater the amount of information and contributions the school principal requires from the teachers to implement the change, the further right he will have to move on the continuum. To obtain appropriate information and contributions from others, requires time.

- What is at stake. The greater the short-term risk potential in respect of organisational efficiency and survival as change occurs, the further left the school principal has to move on the continuum.

4.4 Findings with regard to research aim 4: Methods to manage resistance to change

School principals are sometimes unaware of the various methods that can be utilised to decrease resistance to change, and the advantages and disadvantages of the relevant methods. The following are a few of the most important methods that the school principal has at his disposal to manage the resistance to change (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979; Robbins, 1984; Moerdyk & Fone, 1988; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 1991):

Education and communication

A common method which diminishes resistance to change, is to inform and educate the teachers involved as early as possible about the necessity for and logic of the change. This method can, for example, comprise individual discussions, group discussions, memoranda and reports. By discussing the reasons for change and listening to understand the needs and viewpoints of those involved, will enable both the school principal and teacher to understand why the change is (or is not) necessary.

This method is particularly suitable when resistance is due to insufficient or inaccurate information and results in prejudice; when teachers are naturally conservative and offer resistance; and when the assistance of the teachers who offer resistance is needed for implementing the change. Initially, however, this method is dependent on mutual trust between the school principal and the teachers who offer resistance to it. The method also demands time and effort, especially when many individuals are involved.

Participation and involvement

People enjoy taking a decision on an issue themselves. The implication of this is that teachers must be involved in the change as soon as possible so that they accept responsibility for it. It is unlikely that individuals will offer resistance to change when they have shared in the decision-making and therefore also the responsibility for it. This method is specifically used when the school principal does not have all the information necessary to bring about the change, and the staff members have sufficient power to wreck the plan.

An advantage of this method is that teachers will be motivated by their commitment (psychological ownership) to generate ideas and information and will co-operate in applying it. A disadvantage is the possible squandering of time and also the possibility that poor solutions will be provided for problems. Critical yet objective monitoring processes, however, can to a large extent preclude this disadvantage.

Facilitation and support

As an agent of change, the school principal can apply a vast series of support techniques to diminish resistance to change. Examples of these are: the provision of re-educational and emotional support programmes, understanding and an opportunity for those involved to talk while he listens attentively. The method is particularly suitable when the tension level of those involved is high, or when staff members experience adjustment problems and consequently offer resistance. The disadvantage of the method is that it is time-consuming and expensive, success is not controllable and the school principal must receive training in the relevant skills.

Negotiation and agreement

A further method which the school principal can employ to handle potential resistance to change, is to "exchange" something of value for a decline in the resistance. It comprises for example, negotiation with a view to attaining a satisfactory agreement with workers' unions or individuals, such as an increase in

pension benefits in lieu of early retirement. The method can be applied when a teacher or group of teachers with a high measure of resistance limits growth and development.

The advantage of this method is that it solves a high level of resistance with relative ease and rapidity. Disadvantages are, inter alia, that it can result in high costs and an individual or group is made more aware of the negotiating skills, which could delay the solution process. It can also be time-consuming to reach agreement by means of negotiation.

Persuasion and influence

When change is urgent and the school principal has a great deal of influence, use can be made of persuasion and influence. The method can be used constructively when the majority of teachers accepts the envisaged change and only a few teachers offer resistance.

The advantage of this method is that speedy results can be obtained with far less resistance as, for example, in the case of coercion. A disadvantage, however, is that it will take a great deal of time to persuade and convince a group or groups of teachers that the change is necessary.

Manipulation and co-optation

Manipulation comprises the isolation of the teacher or group of teachers who offers resistance to the change. It can be done by withholding information, distorting information so that it appears more acceptable, or controlling events artificially. Co-optation is a form of both manipulation and participation. By co-optation the leader(s) of the group of teachers who offer resistance, is/are given a key role in the planning or implementation of the envisaged change. The leader's advice is not necessarily required in order to take better decisions, but to employ his status, authority and power to involve the group in the implementation of the change. The ethical aspects of this method can be a stumbling block to the school principal who has high regard for values such as honesty, sincerity, genuineness and spontaneity. The method is used primarily as a final effort when no other method succeeds or is wasteful.

The advantage of the method is that it is a relatively inexpensive and quick solution for resistance problems. The disadvantage is that it implies an unethical action in which teachers are disadvantaged or manipulated. The danger also exists that those

involved could become aware of the fact that they have been misled, and this could seriously affect the principal's credibility.

Force

The method comprises coercion by the school principal to adapt to the change by way of threats for example, job loss, withholding promotion, dismissal and transfer. The method is used when it is imperative to implement and conclude change swiftly and the school principal has sufficient authority.

This method has the advantages of rapid application and crushing any type of resistance. The disadvantage is that negative feelings such as frustration, fear, aggression and loneliness could ensue.

4.5 Findings with regard to research aim 5: A Model for managing resistance to change *(cf. figure 3)*

The school principal can follow the following guidelines if the envisaged change is to succeed and simultaneously decrease the resistance to change (*and more specifically passive resistance to change*):

- Analyse the school in respect of the present situation, problems and the forces possibly responsible for the problems, the importance and urgency of the problems, and the type of change which must be made.
- Identify and analyse the factors that can play a role in the envisaged change. In the analysis, the focus should fall on questions such as: who is likely to offer resistance to the change, why could there be possible resistance, how intense is the resistance likely to be; who disposes of the information essential for planning the change, whose co-operation is needed for implementing the change; and what is the position of the school principal compared to the others in respect of, inter alia, authority, trust and other aspects affecting interaction.
- Decide on a strategy, based on the preceding analysis and the tempo of the change, and consider the amount of planning, degree of involvement of other individuals and methods to be utilised to handle the various individuals and groups.
- Monitor the change process and evaluate the success of managing resistance. Even though the strategy and methods are painstakingly selected, there can still be unforeseen circumstances (resistance) during

the implementation of the change that can only be handled through careful monitoring and management.

The preceding is summarised as follows is *figure 3*.

4.6 Findings with regard of research aim 6: The management of polarity *(cf. figures 4 & 5)*

The last finding concerns the management of polarity. Another method of managing resistance to change is the polarity-model/polarity paradigm (developed by Barry Johnson - 1992). It seems that for the management of active and / or aggressive resistance to change the polarity-model can be used. To implement the polarity-model the school administrator can use the polarity matrix (cf. *figure 4*).

Johnson (1992:21-22) illustrates the polarity management process with the breathing example. If breathing is a problem, can it be solved by choosing to either inhale or exhale? To prove his point he instructs the reader to inhale slowly for 10 seconds and then hold his/her breath. The reader will experience that although inhaling is essential and feel good at first, he/she will soon experience the downside of inhaling, namely too much carbon dioxide. Although exhaling, in turn, relieves the negative symptoms of carbon dioxide, a too long stretch of exhalation also has its negative effects in the need for fresh oxygen that is soon experienced.

This example illustrates Johnson's argument that the inhale/exhale polarity can't be solved by choosing either the one or the other; the solution lies in managing both the benefits and the limits of each. Managing the breathing polarity thus requires choosing both inhalation and exhalation.

The notion that people (teachers) resist change per se is accurate but not the full truth. People/teachers resist the downside of change (negative side) and the loss of the upside (positive side) of resistance. It is also true that people/teachers resist the downside (negative side) of resistance and the loss of the upside (positive side) of change (*cf. figure 5).*

Therefore if resistance is to be managed to effect change and both those that resist and whish for change are to be satisfied, the polarity process should be managed by not only gaining the benefits of each pole (polarity and in this case the poles are both change and resistance), but also considering the limits (*cf. figures 4 & 5*). From this point of view it is clear that the two poles (resistance and change) are

interdependent, and managing polarity, therefore, requires both resistance and change according to certain action steps (*cf. figures 4 & 5*).

8. The value of resistance to change

From the aforementioned and the literature it also appears that resistance to change can make a positive contribution to the management of resistance. That is why resistance to change is desirable and even necessary. The most important contribution that resistance makes to change, is:

- It points to a need for more information on the nature, aim and value of the change.
- It can lead to better communication between the Department of Education, the school principal and the personnel.
- Specific problem areas can be identified.
- It can lead to the improvement in planning the change and a better implementation thereof.
- Resistance can also give an indication of how intensely staff members experience resistance to change.

It therefore appears that change usually takes place despite the resistance to it. Resistance to change is merely a signal that the change has not been handled or managed properly. That is why resistance to change can also be valuable.

REFERENCES

Aggleton, P. 1987. *Rebels without a cause? Middle class youth and the transition from school to work*. London: Falmer.

Chase, G. 1988. Accommodation, resistance and the politics of student writing. *College composition and communication*, 39(1):13-22.

Coetsee, L.D. 1993. A practical model for the management of resistance to change: an analysis of political resistance in South Africa. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 16(11): 1815 - 1837.

Dalin, P. 1978. *Limits to educational change*. London: Macmillan.

Gerber, P.D., Nel, P.S. & Van Dyk, P.S. 1994. *Human Resources Management*, Pretoria: Southern. (Second edition, fourth impression.)

Giroux, H.A. 1983. *Theory and resistance in education: a pedagogy for the opposition*. Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey.

Gjerde, P.F. 1983. An interactional model for resistance to change in educational institutions. (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association. Anaheim, CA. August 26-30.)

Hall, G.E. & Hord, S.M. 1987. *Change in schools: facilitating the process*. Albany: State University of New York.

Hanson, E.M. 1985. *Educational administration and organizational behaviour*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Johnson, B. 1992. *Polarity Management: Identifying and Managing Unsolved Problems*. Massachusettes: HRD Press.

Kotter, J.P. & Schlesinger, L.A. 1979. Choosing strategies for change. *Harvard business review*, 57(2):106-114.

Lovell, J.T. & Wiles, K. 1983. *Supervision for better schools*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

Lunenburg, F.C. & Ornstein, A.C. 1991. *Educational administration: concepts and practices*. Belmont, Ca.: Wadsworth.

Moerdyk, A.P. & Fone, J.P. 1988. Resistance to change - its origin and management. Part II: Implementing a change process. *IPM Journal*, 6(9): 26-30.

Robbins, S.P. 1984. *Management: concepts and practices*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Smith, M. & Crane, B. 1990. Managing change: management challenges when integrating special needs teaching in the primary school. *Educational management and administration*, 18(1):46-53.

Figure 1
Types of Resistance to Change

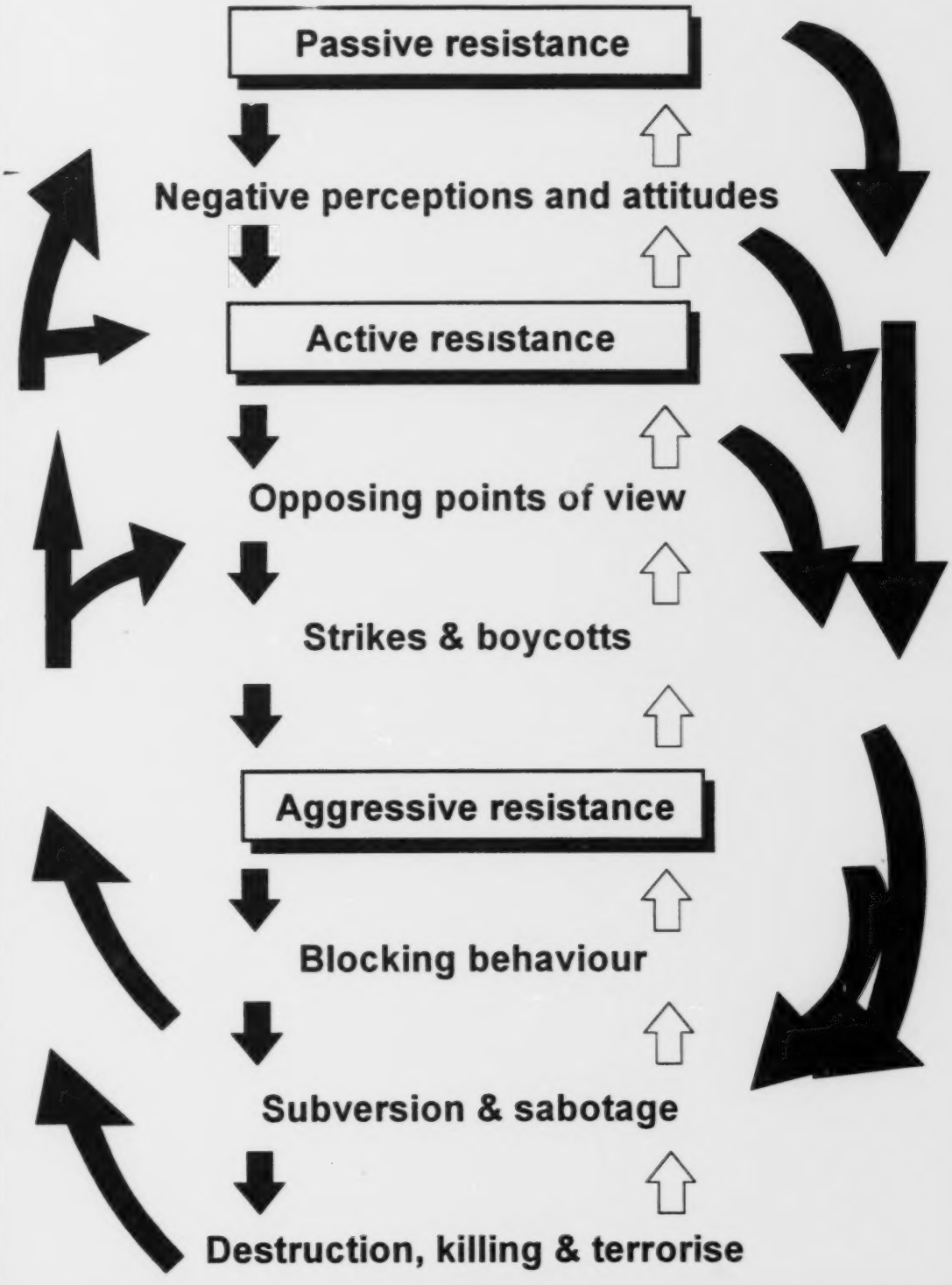

Figure 2
Strategic choices in managing resistance to change

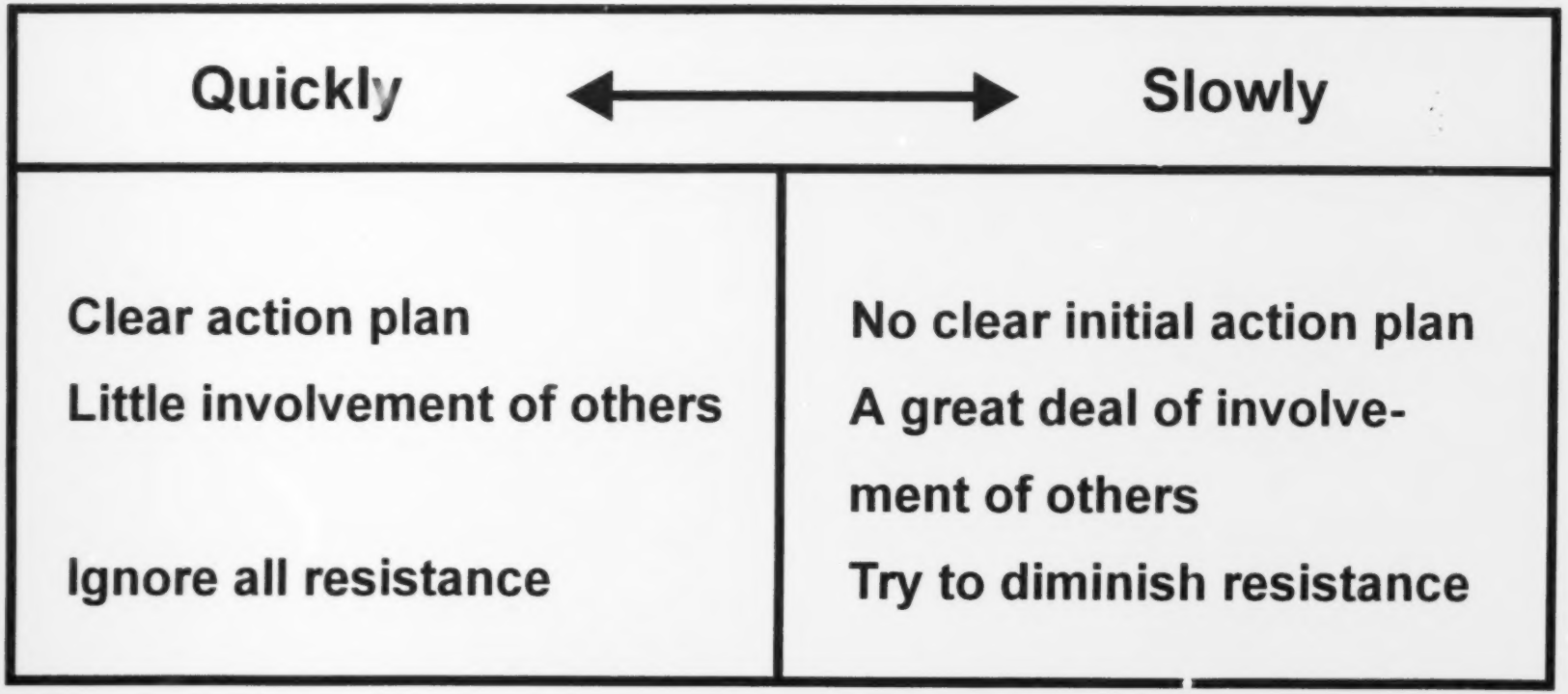

Figure 3
A model for managing resistance to change

MANAGEMENT PHASES	MANAGEMENT VARIABLES
PHASE1: Determine the necessity for and the readiness of the school to change	Consider the organisation's culture, climate and previous endeavours to change
PHASE 2: Identify the sources of the resistance to change	Sources can be individuals or groups
PHASE 3: Determine the nature of the resistance to change	The resistance can be passive, active or aggressive
PHASE 4: Diagnose the reasons for the resistance to change	Reasons can be found in the individual, school system or environment.
PHASE 5: Select, develop and implement specific strategies and methods directed at the sources to manage resistance	Consider the strategic continuum. Methods include participation, involvement, cooptation, manipulation and force.
PHASE 6 Evaluate the success of the management of resistance to change	Successful: continue Unseccessful: return to Phase 1.

Figure 4
The Polarity Matrix

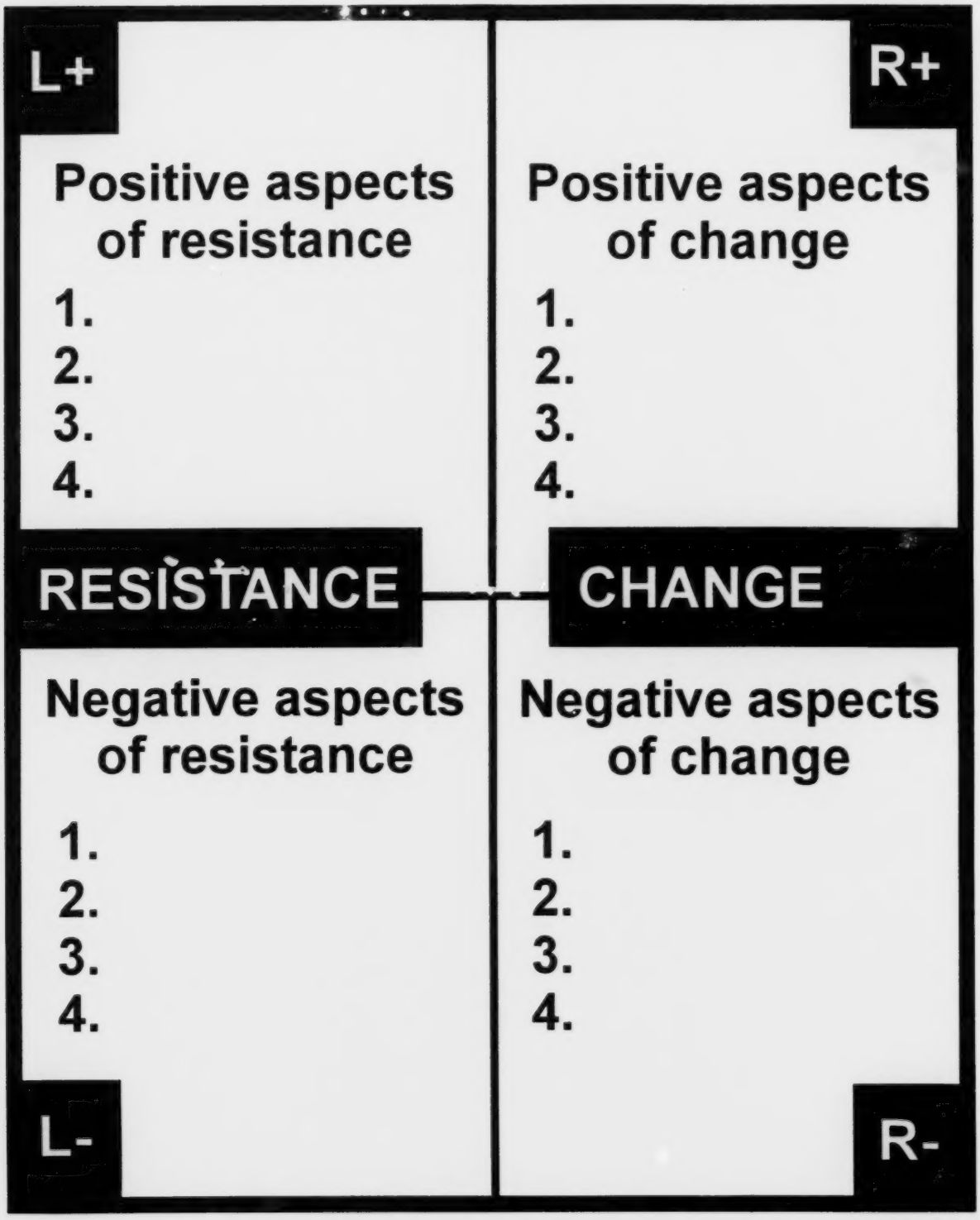

Figure 5
The Process of managing polarity